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Senator Wesley Meredith

WEDNESDAY MARCH 28, 2018

Public Schools Impacted by Pipeline to Receive \$58 Million Fund

This month my colleagues and I sent legislation to Governor Cooper requiring the \$58 million fund he negotiated with energy companies building the Atlantic Coast Pipeline – announced the same day his Department of Environmental Quality approved a key permit for its operations – be distributed to school systems in eastern North Carolina along the path of the project.

The legislation distributes the controversial \$58 million fund to local school systems with a two-step calculation that considers the average daily membership of each school system and the pipeline mileage impacting its district.

According to a summary by the state's Legislative Analysis Division, the allocation of the \$58 million fund to public school systems will include \$15,115,607 to Cumberland County

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The North Carolina Chamber Lists Senator Meredith as Jobs Champion

The North Carolina Chamber has rated me as a "Jobs Champion" for my votes last year on legislation the Chamber favors.



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The Chamber advocates on behalf of business and industry in North Carolina. It listed me as a "Jobs Champions" for my votes for bills that the Chamber considered to be pro-job growth and against bills that the Chamber opposed. In all, 58 pieces of legislation were included in the evaluations.

Among the legislation the Chamber favored: Tax cuts, education bills, including my efforts to foster broadband Internet growth in underserved areas.

I am honored to receive this outstanding achievement. I look forward to continue to work to create jobs and businesses in our district and throughout North Carolina.

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Presidential Budget Military Construction Program Increases to \$315 Million for North Carolina (Fourth Highest in the Nation)

The President's Budget for FY2019 includes \$315.776 million in Department of Defense major military construction at installations in North Carolina. This budget would fund projects at the following bases, in the amounts indicated:

Fort Bragg:	\$42.366 million
MCAS Cherry Point:	\$240.830 million
MCAS New River:	\$32.580 million

In addition to this major construction, North Carolina businesses can anticipate perhaps another \$100 million in sustainment, restoration and modernization construction and facility services contracts. Military construction is big business in North Carolina – including for small businesses.”

The FY2019 budget figure represents an increase from \$293.655 million in major military construction at North Carolina bases in FY2018. At over \$315 million, DoD construction in North Carolina will be the fourth highest of all states in FY2019, trailing only California, Maryland and Missouri. North Carolina military construction ranked sixth in the nation in FY2018.

The FY2019 projects include a dining facility and Special Operations facilities at Fort Bragg, airfield and hangar facilities at MCAS Cherry Point, and a medical and dental clinic facility at MCAS New River.

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Civitas Poll Reveals Overwhelming

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Demand for Bi-Partisan State Board of Elections

The first Civitas poll of the 2018 mid-term election year found that 79 percent of likely North Carolina voters want a state elections board that is equally split between Democratic and Republican parties. The full text of the question is below:

When it comes to the state elections board, would you prefer:

79% A state elections board that is equally split between the Democratic and Republican parties

...or...

11% A state elections board controlled by one party

8% Don't Know

2% Refused

Civitas President Francis De Luca said “even though the NC supreme court may have handed Governor Cooper a partisan victory in his lawsuit over changes to the State Board of Elections, the large majority of voters in North Carolina would prefer to see the bipartisan elections board enacted by the legislature and blocked by Cooper.”

This poll surveyed 1,000 likely voters (30% on cell phones) with a margin of error of +/- 3.10%. This survey was taken February 6-8, 2018.

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Top Claims from Gov. Roy Cooper's Rambling, Raging Press Conference that Don't Pass the Smell Test

As lawmakers, the press and the public continue to await answers to questions surrounding what some are calling Gov. Roy Cooper's personal 'slush fund' – the roughly \$58 million he obtained from energy companies within hours prior to his administration's issuance of a major permit to advance the Atlantic Coast Pipeline – here are the top claims from Cooper's Feb. 14 press conference on the topic that just don't pass the smell test.

Cooper claim #1: His 'slush fund' agreement “was not a binding agreement.”

Why it stinks: The agreement clearly states it was entered into by Roy Cooper acting in his official capacity as North Carolina governor. Its entire purpose is to bind the parties to what they agreed to in the document. If it was truly a 'voluntary contribution,' why did it require a written contract signed by lawyers?

Why would the governor claim this? Is it because he plans to back out of the agreement and no longer accept the funds if they are used to help poor, rural Eastern North Carolina schools?

Cooper claim #2: A majority of Democratic and Republican lawmakers “raided the money that was supposed to improve the economy and bring jobs” to the eight counties along the pipeline’s proposed path.

Why it stinks: We don’t even have to refute this one – the governor did it himself!

Earlier in his own press conference, he said: “we’re talking about N.C. Job Ready – getting our workforce ready for the jobs of today and tomorrow. And education plays a key role,” and

“We’ve got to keep a focus on public education in North Carolina... that’s the key to the skilled workforce that businesses want.”

Even Gov. Cooper can’t talk his way out of the fact that investing \$58 million in our children’s public education in the eight poor, rural Eastern North Carolina counties impacted by the pipeline will help economic development and job creation in that region.

Cooper claim #3: His ‘slush fund’ “was for economic development. This fund was for jobs.”

Why it stinks: Funny how all the governor could talk about for days was environmental mitigation in an effort to appease his base. Even his agreement with the ACP was called the ‘Mitigation Project Memorandum of Understanding.’

But then, as soon as lawmakers reminded him that state and federal law already require utilities building the Atlantic Coast Pipeline to meet environmental mitigation requirements before the project can receive approval, he quickly changed his tune. Yet he repeatedly refused to answer the direct question on why he apparently doesn’t believe investing \$58 million in our children’s public education in the eight poor, rural Eastern North Carolina counties impacted by the pipeline will help economic development and job creation in that region.

And at no point did the governor refer to the other listed potential use of the fund - “developing renewable energy projects.” Was this just an oversight, or was it a deliberate omission, since the Carolina Journal recently reported on an agreement to build a solar farm on Cooper family property near the future pipeline – a farm that potentially could have benefitted from his special fund – that was not disclosed in the governor’s Statement of Economic Interest?

Cooper claim #4: “Independent experts are going to decide how this money is distributed...

We looked at the Clean Water Management Trust Fund. We looked at the Rural Infrastructure Authority...to make sure that this money got to the right place...”

Why it stinks: It just so happens the same entities Cooper touts as ‘independent’ are ones he is currently challenging in court to attempt to move under his total control. Why does he claim these boards are independent at the same time he is seeking complete control of them from the Democratic-controlled Supreme Court? One thing is for certain: the governor and his staff were definitely making plans “to make sure that this money got to the right place” – his ‘slush fund.’

Cooper claim #5: “The permitting process is independent” of his ‘slush fund’ agreement.

Why it stinks: Simply reading the agreement proves this claim false – since, in two separate instances, it’s directly linked to the state permitting process.

“In the event that Atlantic terminates the project before it is placed into service, whether in the unanticipated event that the project fails to obtain and maintain the state approvals or any other necessary permits, certifications, consents, authorizations, and any other approvals or for any other reason in Atlantic’s sole discretion, the Governor of the State of North Carolina shall deliver the proportionate share of the mitigation funds as preserved in accordance with this paragraph to Atlantic within thirty (30) days of the receipt of written notice of termination from Atlantic.”

“The funds shall be allocated pursuant to the guidelines and directives set forth in a subsequent Executive Order that would be issued prior to the completion of the state permitting for the ACP.”

And if the “permitting process is independent” of the agreement, then why was the permit granted just hours after that agreement was finalized and signed – according to WRAL News, “three months earlier than expected?”

Cooper claim #6: A majority of Democratic and Republican lawmakers chose to “violate a court order” by passing legislation to address the state Supreme Court’s concerns regarding the bipartisan board that would investigate ethic complaints – like the one filed against him related to his pipeline deal.

Rather than taking action, lawmakers should have just let the law “revert back to the old law.”

Why it stinks: This new provision fully complies with the N.C. Supreme Court's decision by allowing the governor to fire – at will and at any time – any member of the board who administers elections and investigates ethics violations, as long as he replaces the outgoing member with a member from the same party. It also adds a ninth member, unaffiliated with either of the major parties, eliminating the likelihood of deadlock.

The governor does not have a constitutional right to the status quo, and a court cannot resurrect a law that was taken off the books just because he prefers it. And his party shouldn't have complete, unfettered control of the enforcement of our state's ethics and elections laws. In fact, recent polling shows that 79 percent of North Carolina voters want a bipartisan board.

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New station in Fayetteville, N.C., joins Piedmont's network of 11 publicly available refueling stations

Piedmont Natural Gas announced the opening of a new compressed natural gas (CNG) refueling station in Fayetteville, a sign of growing demand as more companies choose clean, affordable natural gas to fuel their fleets of cars and trucks. This is the second new CNG refueling location the company has announced in a year's time.

Replacing the company's existing Fayetteville station, the new facility is located at 4740 Corporation Drive, strategically positioned near I-95 to provide easy access for trucks and other long-haul carriers. The station also is adjacent to Piedmont's LEED-eligible operations and customer care center, which opened in 2017.

To date, Piedmont has converted approximately 40 percent of its own fleet to natural gas vehicles and expects that percentage to continue to grow. In 2017 alone, Piedmont's CNG business grew by almost 25 percent, and together, Piedmont and its CNG customers displaced more than 6 million gallons of gasoline and diesel.

The station, designed with fast-fill technology, is part of the company's network of publicly accessible stations, with seven stations in North Carolina, three locations in South Carolina, and one location in Tennessee. To view a map that shows all 11 of Piedmont's public CNG refueling facilities and the current price of CNG, visit piedmontng.com/vehiclesandfueling.

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North Carolina Total Retirement Plans named a Finalist in 2018 Plan Sponsor of the Year Awards

The North Carolina Total Retirement Plans have been named as a finalist in the Public Defined Contribution Category of the 2018 Plan Sponsor of the Year Awards. The NC 401(k), NC 457 and NC 403(b) plans together are the largest in the country in terms of numbers of participants.

According to Plan Sponsor's website, the awards "recognize leaders in retirement plan best practices." Award finalists are chosen based on four factors: richness of program offerings, commitment to the program, leadership, and innovation.

Final winners will be announced at Plan Sponsor's annual Excellence in Retirement Awards celebration in New York City on Thursday, March 29, 2018.

Background: The North Carolina Retirement Systems is the tenth largest public pension fund in the country. It provides retirement benefits and savings to more than 900,000 members, including teachers, state employees, firefighters, police officers and other public workers. For more information, visit www.nctreasurer.com.

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